**Built on the Rock**

Based on [Matthew 16:13-20](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt16.13-20)

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In todays Gospel lesson Jesus teaches his disciples about his church. He teaches what His church is built on. He teaches how well His church will fare against her enemies. And he teaches what authority he will give to His church on earth.

First, Jesus teaches what his church is built upon. Jesus asks his disciples, “**Who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Son of John. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church**.”

Jesus says here that he will build his church upon a certain “rock.” This should remind us of a parable Jesus already told his disciples. “**Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it**” (Matt 7:24-27).

This is good advice from a man who is both a carpenter and God in the flesh. Build your house on the rock so it can weather the storm, not on sinking sand. But Jesus, in building his church is not building a physical building. The church is made of people…holy people. Peter writes in his first epistle, “**You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ**” (1 Pe 2:5).

The church is people, a congregation of saints…of Holy People. And these people are built upon a rock. Not just any rock, though…a particular rock “**the rock**.” What then is “the rock” upon which the church is built.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that because Jesus calls Simon “Peter” which means “Rock”--that Jesus is saying he will build his church on this man, this one of his 12 apostles…the man Simon Peter. **The Roman Church teaches that in this scripture, Jesus gives Peter a particular office, the office of the Pope, “Papa”, Supreme Pontiff, Vicar of Christ on earth.** And on this basis, the Pope claims that he has all authority in heaven and on earth, even the authority to establish official doctrine. **He claims that he speaks for Christ, even in matters where the Scriptures are silent**. The entire establishment of the Roman Catholic Church depends upon that interpretation of Jesus words here. And it is patently false.

First, this passage says nothing about an “office” of Peter. Jesus speaks only to the man Peter. Let’s just say, for argument sake, that Peter is the one rock upon which Jesus built his church. Even if that is true, there is no indication in this passage that he intends for Peter to have a successor. Peter has long since died; and now the church is without Peter just as it is without Jesus until he returns. **All we have left of Jesus’ words and of Peter’ss words are what is contained in the sacred writings, the holy scriptures, the Bible**. And we have no access to Jesus or Peter apart from what has been written (1 Cor 4:6). Even were Peter to be “the rock” upon which the church is built, Peter is dead. And the church must live on without him, and is perfectly equipped to do so, because even though we don’t have Peter, we have God’s Word to instruct us and guide us in all truth.

A second reason why Jesus is not here making Peter pope is because **Jesus himself forbids his church from having a pope**. ***Jesus himself forbids his church from having a pope.***  Jesus said to his disciples in Matt. 23, “**But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And *call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven***” (Matt 23:28-29). Pope is latin for “papa”, “father”. And Jesus says, **call no one among you Father, no one “Pope.”** This is not to say that you can’t call a called minister of the Word, “teacher”, or “pastor” or even “father.” Scripture calls ministers these things. But what Jesus is saying here is this: ***do not go to any such individual as though they are the source of my teaching***.

According to Roman Catholic teaching, the Pope has the authority to establish doctrines---*teachings* that you *must believe* to be saved, teachings that are no where taught in Holy Scripture. This is exactly what Jesus says not to do. The church may not give anyone the authority to speak for Christ where Christ himself has not already spoken.

And a third reason that Jesus does not make Peter the pope, because the other apostles do not acknowledge Peter as having authority over them. The disciples continue to ask Jesus and dispute among themselves who will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. This wouldn’t have happened had they understood Jesus to have already given Peter that distinction. And the apostle Paul writes in Galatians, “**When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned**” (Gal. 2:11). If Jesus built his church on Peter and gave Peter all authority in the church, then Paul would never dare oppose Peter to his face.

In Acts 23:3-5, Paul unintentionally insults a Jewish High Priest. The Jews who are otherwise leveling false charges against Paul, rightfully rebuke him. And Paul repents, saying “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’” Paul repented because he recognized the High Priest as a ruler of the Jews. But he did not repent of rebuking Peter because Peter was not a ruler of the apostles.

In Galatians, Paul says that Peter made a doctrinal mistake, a mistake for which Paul had to publically rebuke Peter, the supposed Pope himself! This contradicts any claim to Peter, let alone any later Pope, being a divinely appointed ruler over other ministers. Add to that the history of Popes who were admitted fiends and hypocrites in the past. On at least one occasion in history, two different men claimed to be the rightful pope. What a horrible foundation for the church to be built on a pope, who is no less a sinful man than you or me.

No, Jesus built his church not on a sinful man named Peter, but upon a sinless man who is God in the flesh. When Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God; Jesus says “**Blessed are you Simon…for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father in heaven**.” Peter is called the rock because he received the revelation that is the true rock of the church…that Jesus is the Christ the son of the living God. And if Jesus is the Christ, then *His words* are like a rock upon which a man can build his house, and when rain falls, and the flood comes, and the winds blow and beat on that house it will not fall, because it is been founded on the solid rock…the revelation of Jesus Christ as the son of God and the only source of God’s authority on earth.

That brings us to the second teaching of this text: how will Christ’s church fare in the world against her enemies? Jesus says, “**On this rock [the revelation of his true identity] I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.**” Modern Christianity has all but disregarded this promise of Jesus to their open shame. Popular, relevant, “box” churches of today were literally built upon consumer reports and evaluations. “Our church isn’t going to survive unless we do \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

The rock of contemporary churches is whatever *they think* fills in this blank. “Unless we *get rid of pious age old hymns and replace them with love songs to God*, the church isn’t going to survive.” Unless we turn the communion table of the Lord into a concession stand, the church isn’t going to survive. Unless the pastor puts more jokes and corny stories in his sermons. Whatever a church puts in that blank--if it isn’t taught in God’s word--is an idol, a that church sold its birthright for a bowl of porridge.

It’s always some sort of surrender to the spirit and culture of the day that is supposed to “save” the church from the gates of hell. But the church has survived for two millennia--not by conforming to the culture--but by being a rock of truth through it all. Paul says in our epistle, “**Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind**.”

The contemporary culture is not the rock; the truth of Jesus Christ is the rock, and a church built on that will weather any storm. A contemporary church is only temporary; a traditional church eternal, because it passes down from generation to generation the eternal treasure of Christ which it first received from the Father who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all. Culture be damned, but the gates of hell will not prevail against Christ and a church built upon him and his word.

Finally, Jesus teaches what authority he gives his church on earth. He says to Peter and all who receive the revelation of Christ from the Father, “**I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven**.” This is Jesus’ mission statement to the church. The churches central defining purpose is to forgive sins on Christ’s behalf, and to not forgive sins on Christ’s behalf.

Two things to notice here. First is that, the church must be defined by her mission. The Church, we said early, is the congregation of saints, the gathering of holy people. But that’s not it. If we all came here at Sunday morning at 10 am and shared coffee, or played Parcheesi, or even made soup and invited the poor and fed them, we would not be acting as the church. If we form a softball team made up of members of RLC, it is not really the church playing softball.

The question of “where is the church located” must be answered. Rome said, “where the pope is and his authority is recognized, there is the church.” Most protestant Christians say the church is wherever Christians are gathered, but that’s not true either. It is Jesus who says, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them.” “In my name” means “according to my purposes.” And Jesus says right here plain as day and more sure than the sunrise that the purpose of the church is to bind and to lose; that is to forgive and retain sins.

“Where is the church” Augsburg Confession article 7 says “The church is the congregation of saints in which the Gospel is purely taught and the sacraments are correctly administered.” The gospel is the forgiveness of sins preached, the sacraments are the forgiveness of sins given out.

Where is the church? Don’t look for the Pope, he is antichrist. Don’t look for a building with a cross on the top, such an x can mark the wrong spot. In looking for the church, where the people of God gather, look for the forgiveness of sins. **If the church is gathering to forgive the sins of those who repent, and to bind the unbelieving world to their sin, that is where the church is built.**  In Lethbridge, in Calgary, in Timbuktu, anywhere that a group of people come together in Jesus name to give and receive Christ’s forgiveness, there is the church doing her job. He has given the church the keys to unlock heaven for those who seek Christ, and to lock heaven to those who reject him. The church may grow in prominence or shrink in visibility as the ages run and the culture shifts, but the church will never disappear because Christ promises that where the gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments correctly given, the gates of hell cannot stand; and Christ will preserve his sheep.

Church is built on Christ and his authority; will survive the gates of hell; has authority to forgive sins.